

Title: Tattoos, Stigma, and National Identity among Guatemalan Deportees

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Abstract: In 2012, the United States deported a record high of 40,000 Guatemalans. This essay contributes to the small but growing literature on post-deportation experiences through an analysis of interviews with 35 Guatemalan deportees, and a focus on those nine deportees who had prominent tattoos. I build on previous ethnographic accounts of the deportee experience which highlight six themes: 1) a sense of unfamiliarity with the land of citizenship, 2) profound despair with regard to future prospects, 3) the salience of state power in the lives of deportees both in the United States and abroad, 4) the ways that transnational practices change for deportees, 5) the stigma associated with being a deportee, and 6) the desire for and very real possibility of return to the United States (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Coutin 2010; Golash-Boza 2013; Headley 2005; Peutz. 2006; Schuster and Majidi 2013; Precil 1999; Zilberg 2007; 2004). The deportees whose experiences shape this article share many of these experiences. Guatemalan deportees who have tattoos face specific challenges and employ particular survival strategies. I found that deportees experienced police, neighborhood, and gang-related violence because of their tattoos, even if the tattoos aren't gang-related. Despite this, none of them were willing to remove their tattoos, as they consider their tattoos to be deep signifiers of their own stories and struggles. Tattooed Guatemalan deportees serve as scapegoats for rising crime in Guatemala City. Like other Guatemalan deportees, their bilingual and bicultural knowledge makes them ideal laborers in transnational call centers in Guatemala City – the only institutions willing to hire deportees with visible tattoos.

Tattoos, Stigma, and National Identity among Guatemalan Deportees

In Guatemala City, planeloads of deportees arrive most days at the Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca – the Guatemalan Air Force base. The deportees fly on chartered airplanes, which charge the U.S. government about \$25,000 per flight to Guatemala. On the airplane, they are handcuffed and shackled. If airline personnel give them food or water during the flight, the passengers have to figure out how to eat with the handcuffs on.

Once the deportees are unshackled and permitted to get off the plane, Guatemalan soldiers and various government liaisons greet them. The deportees walk single file into a room, where they sit in rows of white plastic chairs. On each chair is a paper bag with a sandwich and a drink for them in case they arrive hungry. The Ministry of Foreign Relations provides the food. Once everyone is seated, a government official explains to the deportees the process they must go through in order to leave the Air Force base. He or she also welcomes them to Guatemala and reminds them to use their real names, as they have nothing to fear, now that they are in their own country.

Immigration agents call each deportee by name, using a list provided by the United States Department of Homeland Security. The immigration agents verify that they are indeed Guatemalan, and not Ecuadorian, for example. They also ask when they left Guatemala and through which port of exit. The Ministry of Health officials must also check each deportee for communicable diseases. The most common problems are respiratory diseases, and the occasional case of tuberculosis. The Ministry of Health officials wear surgical masks, as do many of the immigration agents. In 2009, they cited H1N1 as the reason for the masks. Each deportee also has to have his or her criminal record checked by the Guatemalan police, to ensure that they do not have an outstanding warrant in Guatemala.

Deportees also get access to a limited number of services. Banrural, a Guatemalan bank, exchanges US dollars for Guatemalan Quetzales at market rate. The Ministry of Foreign Relations provides deportees with a two-minute phone call to arrange pick up. In some cases, they can call the United States, especially if they need to call home to get the phone number for a relative in Guatemala. The Ministry of Employment

also has its liaisons available, who can point deportees to jobs for which they may qualify. In reality, though, few deportees secure employment in this way.

Between one and four hours after they land, Guatemalan officials give deportees their luggage – if they have any – and permit them to leave the airport. Some deportees find their relatives waiting outside for them. Others find taxis and contract them for a ride straight to the Guatemalan border. Other deportees take advantage of the bus the Ministry of Foreign Relations provides to terminals where they can board a long-distance bus to their hometowns. People who are unable to contact their relatives can also take this same bus to a shelter called Casa del Migrante, where they can stay as they try to locate their relatives.

Deportees who stay in Guatemala City have to figure out how to survive. Usually, relatives help them out initially. Most deportees find an aunt or uncle willing to take them in and help them get on their feet.

Deportees who have grown up in the United States usually have the most to learn about how to navigate life in Guatemala City. Those deportees who arrive with tattoos confront an additional obstacle: they face extreme stigmatization because of their tattooed bodies. I interviewed 33 deportees in Guatemala. In this essay, I will focus on nine of these deportees who arrived in Guatemala with tattoos.

This essay contributes to the small but growing literature on what happens to people after deportation. Scholars from diverse disciplines have analyzed the causes and consequences of the soaring number of deportations (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Hagan, Eschbach, and Rodriguez 2008; Hagan, Rodriguez, and Castro 2011; Hing 2003; Hernandez 2008; Kanstroom 2012; King, Massoglia, and Uggen 2012; Kretsedemas 2012; Golash-Boza 2012). Ethnographic accounts of the deportee experience highlight five themes: 1) a sense of unfamiliarity with the land of citizenship, 2) profound despair with regard to future prospects, 3) the salience of state power in the lives of deportees both in the United States and abroad, 4) the ways that transnational practices change for deportees, 5) the stigma associated with being a deportee, and 6) the desire and very real possibility of return to the United States (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Coutin 2010; Golash-Boza

2013; Headley 2005; Peutz. 2006; Schuster and Majidi 2013; Precil 1999; Zilberg 2007; 2004). The deportees whose experiences shape this article share many of these experiences I focus on the challenges faced and survival strategies deployed by Guatemalan deportees who have tattoos.

This essay is a preliminary statement of my findings, based on the reintegration experiences of Guatemalan deportees. This essay is part of a broader, more comprehensive study of the consequences of U.S. deportation policy in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Jamaica.

Tattoos and Stigmatization in Central America

Gang-related tattoos carry stigma both in the United States and in Central America. In the United States, people with gang-related tattoos face police harassment and criminalization. In Central America, police and the general population perceive people with tattoos as criminals and gang members. In El Salvador, employers are reluctant to hire deportees who have tattoos and wear urban gear. Neighbors and even family members look upon such deportees with suspicion (Coutin 2010; Zilberg 2007).

Immigration courts in the United States frequently hear asylum and Convention against Torture cases based on the fear potential deportees have about returning to Central American countries with visible tattoos. In February 2010, in a case before the Ninth Circuit Court, Gregory Aguilar argued that he should not be deported to El Salvador in light of his fear of being killed, persecuted, and harassed in El Salvador because of his multiple tattoos and status as a deportee. He contended that Salvadoran police and gang members would presume he is a gang member, even though he is not. El Salvador's punitive anti-gang laws mean that, upon deportation, Aguilar-Ramos could face: "(1) imprisonment for two to six years under El Salvador's broad anti-gang legislation; (2) death or serious bodily harm in prison; (3) harassment by police and military patrols who routinely force young men to remove their shirts for tattoo inspections; and (4) death at the hands of death squads, which are comprised of off-duty police and military personnel." The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals granted

Aguilar's petition for review of his application for relief under the Convention against Torture.¹

Most of the work on deportation and tattoos has focused on El Salvador (Coutin 2010; Zilberg 2007). One exception is a 2007 study of gang violence and deportation in Guatemala (Berlin et al 2007). This study, carried out by Georgetown University law students, found that Guatemalan deportees who have tattoos usually return immediately to the United States because of the threats and dangers they face in Guatemala. Deportees with tattoos find that the police will harass them, arrest them, and even inflict violence upon them. Additionally, Guatemalan gang members will attempt to kill them because they do not recognize their tattoos and think they are from a rival gang. People in their neighborhoods will threaten to kill them if they do not move to another neighborhood. Berlin et al's study indicates that the situation in Guatemala resembles that in El Salvador, although Guatemala does not have any laws that officially prohibit people from having gang-related tattoos.

Mass Deportation from the United States to Guatemala

Deportations to Guatemala have increased in recent years. Overall deportations from the United States are at a record high. Between 1997 and 2012, the U.S. government carried out 4.2 million deportations. This figure amounts to more than twice the sum total of *every deportation* in the history of the United States prior to 1997 (1.9 million people). Only Mexico receives more deportees from the United States than Central America.

Figure 1: Removals 1892-2011²

¹ Gregory Stuart AGUILAR-RAMOS, Petitioner, v. Eric H. HOLDER Jr., Attorney General, Respondent. No. 07-70240. Argued and Submitted Nov. 4, 2009. -- February 04, 2010 Online at: <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/data2/circs/9th/0770240p.pdf> Accessed May 20, 2013.

² As of April 1, 1997, the government reclassified all exclusion and deportations procedures as "Removal proceedings," but in this essay, I use the terms deportation and removal interchangeably

Removals, 1892-2011

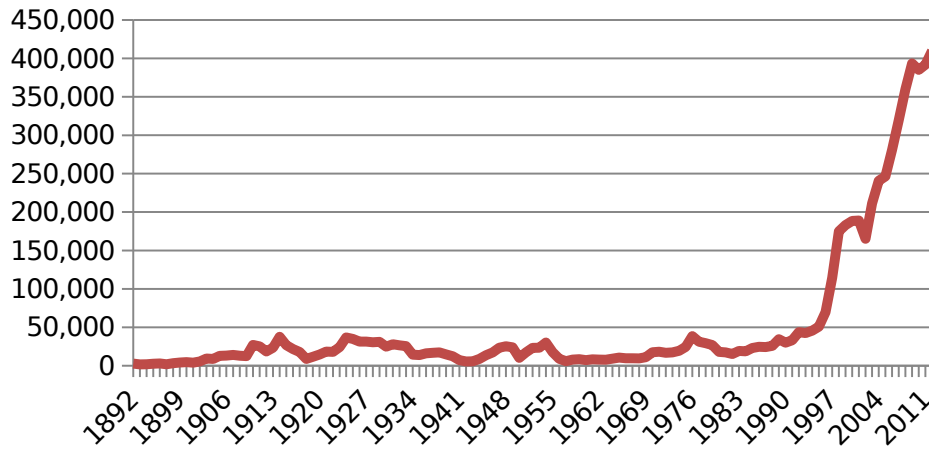
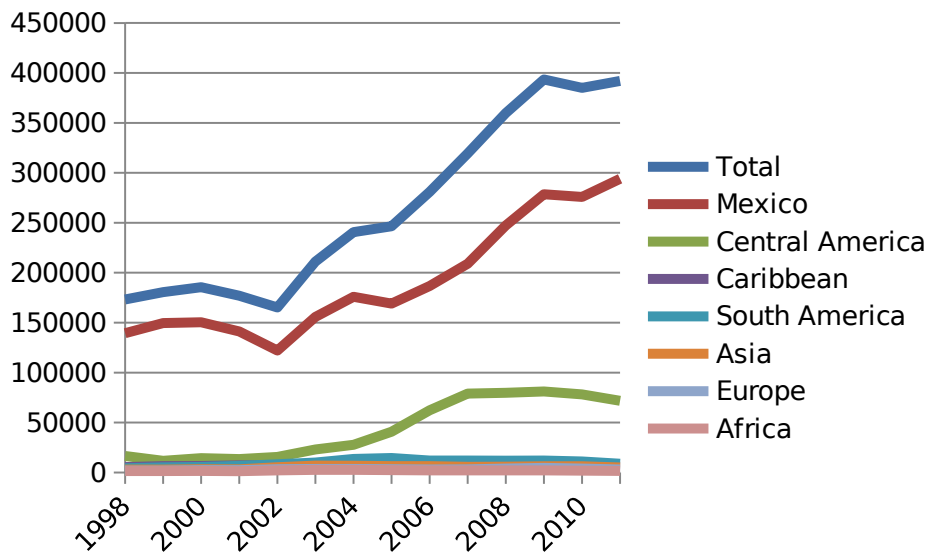


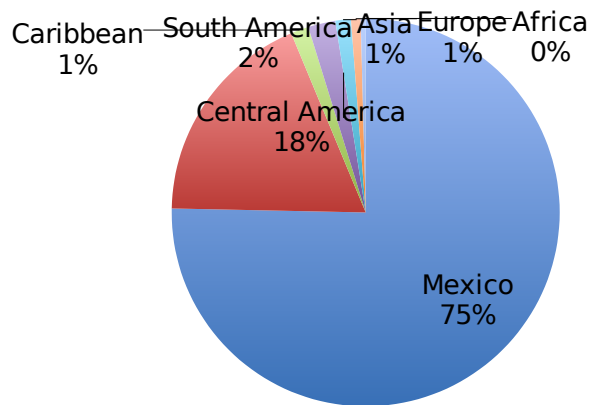
Figure 2: Total Removals and Removals by Region, 1998-2011



Source: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

Figure 3: Country of origin of removals

Removals, 2011



Source: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics

Deportations are at a record high for two reasons. The first reason is legislative. In 1996, Congress passed two laws that fundamentally changed the rights of all foreign-born people in the United States—the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA). These laws eliminated judicial review of some deportation orders, required mandatory detention for some non-citizens, and introduced the potential for the use of secret evidence in certain cases. Six years prior, the Immigration Act of 1990 had expanded the definition of who could be deported for engaging in criminal activity, and made many immigrants deportable for having committed “aggravated felonies” (Fragomen and Bell 2007). The 1996 laws further expanded the definition of an aggravated felony, and made deportation mandatory. Under IIRIRA, aggravated felonies include any felony or misdemeanor that carries a sentence of at least a year in prison. These crimes can be relatively minor, such as the theft of baby clothes from a department store, or the combination of two minor illegal drug possessions. These cases do not require judicial review, meaning people do not have the right for a judge to take into account the specifics of the case or the ties that person has to the United States. Furthermore, the law has been applied retroactively. This means that

any legal permanent resident charged with a crime at any time during their stay in the United States could be subject to deportation. For example, a person could have come to the United States legally at age 2, been convicted of attempted arson at age 18, and—twenty years later, after the passage of IIRIRA—deported at age 38. Even adopted children of U.S. citizens have faced deportation under these laws, in those cases where parents failed to naturalize their children prior to age 18 (Morawetz 2000; Master 2003).

Immigration proceedings in the United States are civil, not criminal, in nature, and do not include all the due process protections afforded to people accused of crimes. INS can detain non-citizens without a bond hearing to assess their flight risk or danger to society. They can be deported without due process. The 1996 laws took all discretion away from immigration judges when a defendant has been convicted of an aggravated felony. Without judicial review, these judges have to deport legal permanent residents who have lived in the United States for decades, have contributed greatly to society, and have extensive family ties in the country, for relatively minor crimes they may have committed years ago. Judges do not have the opportunity to take their family and community ties into account. Nor can judges take into account weak or non-existent linkages to their countries of birth. The only recourse that people facing deportation on aggravated felony charges have is to hire their own lawyer (often paying thousands of dollars) to argue that the charge they face is not in fact an aggravated felony. If the judge determines that the crime is indeed an aggravated felony, the defendant cannot present evidence that, for example, he is the sole caregiver of a disabled U.S. citizen child. Without judicial review, the judge cannot take family ties or the needs of U.S. citizen children into account in aggravated felony cases.

The second reason for mass deportation is record government expenditures on immigration law enforcement.

George W. Bush created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003. Since then, it has grown into a massive government agency. The FY 2011 budget for DHS was \$56 billion. To put this \$56 billion in perspective, the Department of Education FY 2011 budget was \$77.8 billion, and the Department of Justice \$29.2 billion. DHS direct fully 30 percent of its budget in FY 2011 at immigration law enforcement through Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and

Border Patrol (CBP). Another 18 percent of the total went to the U.S. Coast Guard and five percent to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services—meaning over half of the DHS budget is directed at border security and immigration law enforcement.

A recent report by the Migration Policy Institute found that the U.S. government spends more on federal immigration enforcement than on all other principal federal criminal law enforcement agencies combined.³ My calculations confirm this: immigration enforcement spending heavily outweighs domestic law enforcement spending. In FY 2011, the U.S. government spent \$27 billion on ICE, CBP, and the U.S. Coast Guard. In contrast, the U.S. government spent a total of \$13.7 billion on domestic law enforcement, including the FBI, the DEA, the Secret Service, the U.S. Marshal, and Alcohol, Firearms, and Tobacco.

The combined influence of 1996 legislation and rising commitment of resources to enforcement of immigration law has caused an epidemic of deportation. Deportations averaged about 18,000 annually from 1900-1990, but began escalating in the 1990s. Deportations then increased to over 208,000 removals in 2005. By 2012, that figure had nearly doubled to 409,849 removals.⁴ Moreover, an increasing number of these deportees have strong ties to the United States and few, if any, ties to their country of birth. According to a 2012 ICE report, ICE removed 46,486 non-citizens who reported having at least one U.S. citizen child between January 1 and June 30, 2011 (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2012). A previous report found that DHS deported about 100,000 legal permanent residents who had U.S. citizen children in the ten years spanning 1997 and 2007.⁵

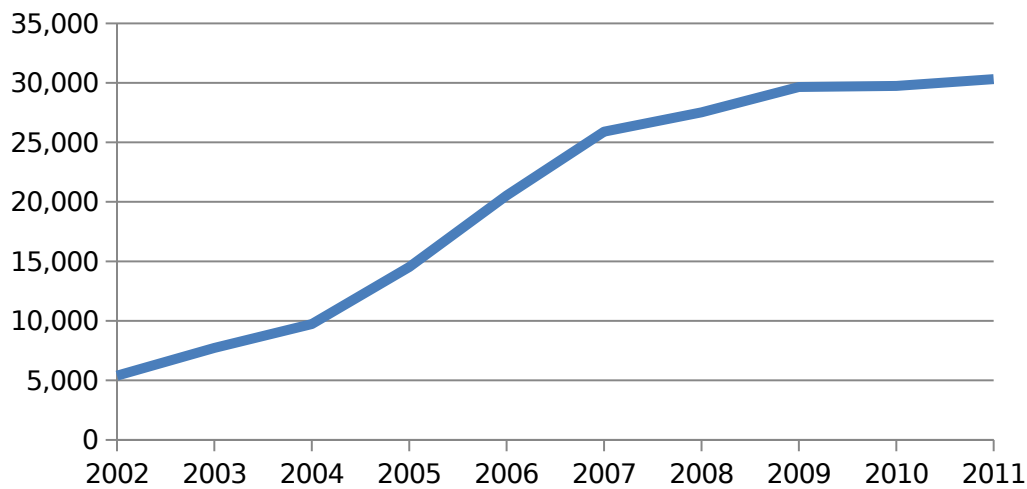
Figure 4: Deportees sent from US to Guatemala: 2002-2011

³ http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/2013_1_07.php

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⁵ In the Child's Best Interest? The consequences of losing a lawful immigrant parent to deportation
http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Human_Rights_report.pdf page 4.
Accessed 2/1/2013.

Deportees: Guatemala



Source: Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration

Statistics

Every week, four to six planes full of deported Guatemalans depart the United States. Most of these deportees are men. In 2005, 14,522 Guatemalans were deported, less than 15 percent of whom had a criminal conviction in the United States. In 2011, 30,313 Guatemalans were deported, 39 percent of whom had a criminal conviction. In six years, the number of deportees doubled and the percentage of those deported on criminal grounds increased 260 percent. Despite this increase in Guatemalans deported on criminal grounds, there is not a generalized stigma against deportees in Guatemala. Unlike in El Salvador, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic, Guatemalans do not tend to presume that deportees are criminals. The stigma of criminality is exclusive to deportees who have visible tattoos.

Methods, Site, and Case Selection

Guatemala is consistently among the top ten countries that receive deportees from the United States. Up until 2009, only 15 percent of Guatemalans were deported on criminal grounds. The low percentage of Guatemalans deported on criminal grounds means that not all deportees face stigmatization. This differentiates Guatemala from countries such as the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, where over three quarters of deportations happen after a criminal conviction and

the stigma against deportees is widespread (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Headley 2005). I chose Guatemala as the site of this study because of the large number of deportees and the lack of a generalized stigma against deportees. However, in my research, it quickly became clear that one group of deportees faces extreme stigma: tattooed deportees.

The nine interviewees I focus on in this essay had an average age of 33, were deported between 2005 and 2009, and had spent an average of 22 years in the United States. Six of the nine deportees left children behind who were born in the United States. All were deported on criminal grounds. Seven of them had been legal permanent residents of the United States and the remaining two had legalization applications pending when they were deported. All of them were men. The average length of the interviews was one hour.

Tattooed Deportees in Guatemala

I spent most of a Friday in the fall of 2009 watching three planeloads of deportees – a total of 280 people – being processed back into Guatemala. When the deportees first arrived, they filed into a room packed with people waiting for immigration officials to call their names. I noticed one of the deportees right away, because of his sharp clothes and sparkling clean tennis shoes. At one point, he flashed a wad of bills. He had a shaved head, and his arms were covered with tattoos. He asked another deportee to trade shirts with him, and when he took off his short-sleeved shirt, he revealed a fully tattooed, muscular upper body. After donning the long-sleeved shirt that covered his tattoos, he went around chatting with various other deportees. When the receiving process was over, he and three others hopped into a cab. Just before getting in the cab, he said, with a Southern California twang: “I am getting up outta here.” The cab driver headed straight for the border. Berlin et al (2007) estimate that the vast majority of tattooed deportees return immediately to the United States.

However, not all tattooed deportees who arrive in Guatemala leave the country immediately, although they may have good reason to do so as deportees face extreme stigma and violence upon arriving home.

Violence

Some deportees experienced police and gang violence as a direct result of their tattoos. Melvin is one example. Melvin moved to the United States when he was 18 years old, as a legal permanent resident. He later married and had two kids with a woman from the United States. He was doing well for himself, with a successful flooring industry, when he was arrested for leaving the scene of a car accident, and deported to Guatemala.

In Guatemala, Melvin stayed with an uncle in Zona 4 de Mixco, a dangerous neighborhood. The tattoos all over his arms and on his neck soon caused problems. Melvin had gotten the tattoos because he liked them, and a friend he knew offered to do them for him. Melvin did not know that Guatemalan gang members considered the spider tattooed on his neck and the spider webs tattooed on his elbows symbols of the gang "18." One day, on his way home to his uncle's house, members of a rival gang spotted Melvin and shot at him. He ducked, but the bullet injured his uncle. The injury was not fatal, but the family decided to move out of that area.

Melvin had not had problems with tattoos in the United States, yet in Guatemala they nearly cost him his life. After the shooting, he moved to his father's halfway constructed house in Santa Catalina, a much safer part of the city. Once the house was finished and Melvin was settled in, his wife and children moved to Guatemala City. She sold their house in suburban Virginia, and they had \$200,000 in savings – enough to set up house in Guatemala. While Melvin suffered no further violence because of his tattoos, his marriage broke up and his wife returned to the United States.

Other deportees who did not have tattoos also experienced violence. For example, two robbers attacked Lorenzo, when he was standing on the street with his wife. When the robbers demanded that Lorenzo give them his phone, he punched one in the face. The other robber cut him with a sharp object, leaving a huge scar across his left cheek. (He explained to me: "When you're from L.A., you don't" just give up your property to muggers.) Neighborhood extortionists saw Chris, who also didn't bear visible tattoos, arrive in fancy American clothes and demanded his family pay them money. When they didn't pay, armed gunmen shot at Chris. Luckily, he responded quickly and lay flat on the ground. Presuming him dead, they drove off. Chris fled to another city, where he hid out for four months.

Once he returned to Guatemala City, Chris got a job at a call center, and Melvin did as well. Having lived in the United States for two decades, Melvin speaks fluent English and thus is able to take calls from customers in the United States. At the call center, he earns enough to get by, but barely makes in a month what he used to earn in a day. He drives to and from his house and his job and avoids going outside at any other time, fearing another incidence of gang violence. He is a target for police and gang members alike. He told me that if he is killed in Guatemala City, no one will ever find out. The police will see his tattoos, presume he is a gang member, and no one will ever care to investigate. Melvin explained his fears:

Melvin: I don't go out because of my tattoos. ... I can walk without my jacket here [in the Call Center]. But if I walk down the street, they shoot me. They see my tattoos, they go, "Oh, he's a gang member." If the gang members don't kill me, the cops will. So, it's bad. But sometimes I'm afraid more of the cops than the gang members 'cause they pull you over, they hit you, they want money. They want to put you in jail. Like, "For what? I didn't do nothing. Here are my papers. I haven't done nothing."

Melvin easily transitioned between talking about fearing violence from gang members to feeling threatened by the police. In my discussions with tattooed deportees, police harassment figured prominently.

Police

When Jose was deported, he had not been to Guatemala since he had left the country with his parents when he was five years old. Jose grew up in Inglewood, California, in the 1980s and 1990s, when gang violence was endemic. Jose joined a gang – Inglewood 13 – and was arrested a few times as a minor. When he turned 18, he was arrested for driving under the influence, and served 10 months in jail for that charge, combined with other charges for driving with a suspended license.

Once Jose got out of jail, he married his fiancée and they had two kids together. He and his wife moved to Wisconsin, to get away from the urban violence in Inglewood. Jose and his wife lived there for nearly three years. However, once their marriage got rocky, they divorced and he moved back to the Los Angeles area. There, he married another woman, with whom he had four children. Jose had a good job

as an electrician. However, one evening, Jose and his wife got into an argument. They went outside so that the children wouldn't hear. A neighbor heard them shouting and called the police. When the police arrived, they arrested Jose and charged him with domestic violence. Jose served time for the charge, and then immigration agents came to deport him to Guatemala.

When Jose arrived in Guatemala City in 2009, thirty years after he left, he had no idea where to go. He slept under a bridge the first night. He only had \$15, which he used to buy food. His father came to Guatemala to help him, but couldn't find him. Jose wandered around the city, asking for help. However, his tattoos proved a barrier greater than his non-native Spanish:

Jose: I speak Spanish, but I speak more like Spanglish and Mexican than the way they do here.... I was able to communicate. Yea, but most people weren't really talking to me because I was... I look like a gang member from here.

Tanya: Are those tattoos gang-related or are they just artistic?

Jose: Both. Both.

Tanya: And do people here recognize your tattoos?

Jose: Oh, yeah, they recognize them ... here, whoever wears a tattoo automatically is either a thief or a gang member, period. There is no distinction. In the States, it's more acceptable. Even for cops and lawyers, it's more acceptable. Not here. Automatically if you have tattoos, you're a thief or a gang member, period. So a lot of people wouldn't talk to me. I was asking questions and they were just, "Get away." Yea. The cops were always looking for me. Yea, pretty much everybody was calling the police. "Oh no, there's a gang member here." And they were trying to pick me up. So I was going place to place trying to hide out for two days. So it was kind of scary, getting back and not knowing anything, where my family was, not knowing. I couldn't get in touch with my own mom. I had no more money. I mean, and everybody sic-cing the cops on me. It was different. It was weird.

Jose learned about the stigma associated with his tattoos almost immediately after getting off the plane. He soon found out that he

would face constant police harassment because of his tattoos. He described an incident that had occurred just a few days before our interview, when he was walking to his job at a call center.

Jose: I have a tattoo here on my neck. So, when I walked, a cop saw one of my tattoos. I was dressed with my button-up shirt and everything, just coming to work. It was 6:30 in the morning. And they had me all stripped down, taking pictures of my tattoos and my ID and where do I live, where do I work, and I'm like, "I work right there." I had my ID and everything and I'm like, "I work right there" [pointing to the building where he worked]. And one of them walked me all the way down here just to make sure I came in. It's harder. It's a lot harder. It's the life and you just have to kind of accept it because that is the way life is here and especially with the gang members here and all the trouble they are causing down here. I mean, you just have to accept that and you can't really do anything. The cops are just doing their job, I mean, but they do go way out of line. The cops go way out of line and you're stuck in like a box that categorizes you plain and simple. A lot of stores don't want you in their shops. When you take the bus, a lot of bus drivers ask you to get down because there have been a lot of killings and muggings and everything. There were a couple of times when they wouldn't let me get on the bus at night. Especially at night. They were like, "No." And I would have to walk all the way over here [several miles]. So, it's hard.

Most of the deportees, like Jose and Melvin, mentioned being stopped by police. They consistently reported having to remove their shirt so that the police could take pictures of them. Larry, who had lived in the United States since he was a baby, told me the police made him get off the bus so they could look at his tattoos. Ben, who arrived in the United States when he was six months old, also told me police pulled him off of a bus because of his tattoos. Jose Carlos described the police harassment he experiences on a regular basis coming home from work

Jose Carlos: The buses drop me off about ten blocks, and I'll walk. But walking sometimes, ... cops will see me, and they'll pull me over. ... They will just stop me. "Where are you going?" "I'm going home; I'm coming home from work." "Where do you

work?" "I work in the call center." "What's in your backpack?" "My lunch." "You don't mind if I check you?" I say, "No."

Jose Carlos explained that the police check him, look at his tattoos, take pictures sometimes, ask him if he is in a gang, and then let him go. He has heard stories of people being robbed by the police and of having drugs planted on them, so he worries about that. Nevertheless, he tries to keep his cool and let the police officers do their job so he can go home.

Of course, youth in the United States also get harassed by police. I asked some of the young men to compare their experiences being harassed by Guatemalan police to the harassment they received in the United States. Jose, for example, told me he also got profiled and harassed by the police in the United States. But he had never feared being shot to death by police in the United States. With tattoos on his body, the Guatemalan police could dispose of his body and anyone who found it would chalk it up to gang violence. Because of the constant harassment, Jose wanted nothing more than to return to the United States, the place he had lived since he was five, and where his wife and six children live. He told me: "I don't want to be here, I want to be at home with my kids. Be home with my wife. Actually, I just wanna be back home because this is not my home. I left when I was five and I'm back now, and I don't like it at all."

Social Stigma

Many deportees reported experiencing social stigma because of their tattoos. People in Guatemala often fear young men with tattoos. Ben has a tattoo that says "Orange" on his arm – in reference to Orange County, as well as three dots on his hand, which refer to "my crazy life" or "mi vida loca" – a reference to gang life in California. He says he often gets stared at when he goes out.

Ben: Some people actually look at me different. Actually when I first got here, I went to the Oakland Mall [an upscale mall in Guatemala City] and because I have tattoos, they just look at me different. They look at me like... At first, I noticed it because I would be walking and they would look at me and they would just look at my arms and they'll just kind of like look away, you know. But I guess that's what they're used to. They're not used to

having people here with tattoos and stuff like that, you know, but they look at me weird unless they know me.

Larry told me that people are intimidated by him because of his tattoos and likely because of his bald head. Larry is unable to grow out his hair. With a bald head, tattoos, and baggy clothes, most Guatemalans are intimidated by him and he usually gets a seat to himself, even on a crowded bus.

Freddy is the only deportee that told me that people aren't scared of him because of his tattoos. He reported similar initial reactions as Larry and the others, but that his manners had an impact:

Freddy: They do stare, right when I get in the bus. But, as I said, I'm working with Jesus. I'm different. You know, I don't have that look. I look at them and say, "Buenas tardes" or "buenos dias," when I go in. So, I show respect, right, I show manners, and they see the difference. Really, I mean, any gang member is not going to go, "Hi, how are you doing?" Really, I mean, they see that. They feel a vibe. Like I said, I have Jesus in me, so they feel the vibe because, you know, they may see it but real quick and then they'll be like, you know, they are like calm.

When Freddy arrived in Guatemala, he was a serious alcoholic. He told me he was fortunate to find the Nicky Cruz Alcohol Rehabilitation Center, which converted him to Evangelism and put him in recovery. He spent over a year there until he was able to live on his own without alcohol. He has had a couple of relapses, but tells me he is alcohol free and working at the call center.

Perhaps because Freddy is not threatening in any other way, he is able to avoid the social stigma associated with tattoos. Freddy is short and chubby and always has a huge smile on his face. In addition, he wears slacks and a polo shirt – clothes that are not associated with societal perceptions about gang life.

Emotional Attachment to Tattoos Among Deportees

While Berlin et al's (2007) study, found that many of the deportees they interviewed had their tattoos removed with laser surgery in Guatemala, my respondents had no interest in removal. I did not interview any deportee with facial tattoos, as Berlin et al did, which may account for the difference. It is likely than even Freddy's kind

demeanor and smiles would not be enough to overcome the extreme stigma of having a facial tattoo.

Melvin told me that his mother told him not to get tattoos because he would go to Guatemala one day and would regret it. But Melvin told me he does not regret getting tattoos. I also asked Jose if he regretted getting tattoos. He explained:

Jose: Not really, because it's part of my past. The culture here is just very behind the times.

Jose, like many deportees, believes there is nothing wrong with his tattoos. They believe there is something wrong with people who believe that people who have tattoos are bad people. I asked Ben if he covers up his tattoos. He told me "No, I didn't put them on to cover them up. I don't care what people say. People give me problems, but, they're not wearing them, you know." Vincent also admitted that his tattoos present a problem for him, but that he "wouldn't take them off for anything."

Deportees displayed an emotional attachment to their tattoos. For Geronimo, for example, his tattoos express his attachment to two countries and his forced exile in one of them.

Geronimo lived in the United States from 1979 until he was deported in 2008. Geronimo's tattoo "Chapin" (Guatemalan) across his back expresses his strong national identity. At the same time, he feels more at home living in the United States. Home has become for him more of an ideal than a reality. He wants to be a Chapin *lejano* – a faraway Guatemalan. In contrast, he does not want to live in Guatemala.



Having “Chapin” tattooed across his back marks him as a Latino in the United States. This tattoo, along with the three dots on his hand that symbolize “mi vida loca” might identify him as a “cholo” or perhaps a gangbanger in some people’s eyes. His “13” tattoo certainly marks him as a gangbanger. In spite of stigma, Geronimo is comfortable with this identity. He knows how to handle his identity and negotiate interactions with friends and strangers, so long as he is in Los Angeles. In contrast, in Guatemala, his tattoos mark him as a *marero* – not just a gang member, but a dangerous one. People move away from him and avoid his gaze on the bus. Police officers harass him. Rival gang members shoot at him. Even after being treated like a social scourge in Guatemala, Geronimo identifies strongly with his country of birth. Geronimo embraces his Guatemalan identity – although it is a Guatemalan identity made in America. Perhaps that is why his leg tattoo features “L.A.” for Los Angeles.



When I met Geronimo, he was living with his aunt and earning a pittance working as a helper to a mechanic. I told him about the call center jobs, where all the other tattooed deportees I had met were working. A month later, he called me with the good news that he had

gotten a job at a call center and was making enough so as not to be a burden for his aunt.

Jose Carlos is one of the few tattooed deportees who thought he could get used to living in Guatemala, even though he first went to the United States as a preschooler. Jose grew up in Houston, and is a gifted artist. In the United States, he was a tattoo artist.

Jose Carlos talks about his time in Guatemala as if it were an adventure. He told me he is happy to be back in Guatemala. When we spoke in 2009, he had been back for four years, and did not wish to return to the United States. He describes people he knew in the United States as materialistic and uptight, and having a sense of entitlement that you don't find in Guatemala. For example, he said that, in Guatemala, you might see a man picking his nose with his fingers on the bus, not caring what others might think. Or, people hanging out the door of a bus. "Here," he said, "you can do what you want, and nobody gives a fuck." Jose Carlos's job at the call center constantly reminds of how things are in the United States. As an example, he explained that when he tells people the technician will arrive between 1pm and 4pm, they freak out because he can't give a more exact time. This reminds him of why he does not want to be in the United States.

I asked Jose Carlos how people treat him in Guatemala. His demeanor, his clothes, his walk, and his tattoos give away his U.S. upbringing. With his urban gear and tattoos, Guatemalans are likely to presume he is a gangbanger. He told me that the police often stop him for no reason. When they do, he shows them his national ID, his work ID, and tells them he is coming home from work. They frisk him, and then let him go. He is okay with that. He admits he has more rights in the United States – that the police wouldn't kill him there, although they could in Guatemala. But, so long as he stays on the right side of the law, he thinks he will be okay.

I asked him how other Guatemalans see him, and if he covers up his tattoos. He told me he used to cover them, but that he doesn't any more. People are often scared of him. Women clutch their purses; people cross the street when they see him. They see his tattoos and presume he is a bad person. He says his tattoos provide him with a certain level of protection in what can be a dangerous city. Jose Carlos is 26 years old and has his life ahead of him. He wants to travel around

Latin America. His tattooing skills may make that possible, as tattoos have greater social acceptance outside of Guatemala, once he gets together enough money from his job at the call center.

Call Centers and Tattooed Deportees

It is ironic that call centers are a saving grace for tattooed deportees. The call centers are U.S. based corporations that outsource their customer service to countries where labor is cheaper. In Guatemala, call center employees start off with 3500 Quetzales a month – just over US\$400. This is enough money for a single person to support himself and more than four times the minimum wage in Guatemala. Deportees who work in call centers are able to answer customer service calls without any customers having to actually see them. Thus, their tattoos don't affect their ability to do their jobs. Call centers could discriminate against visible tattoos. However, it is not in their interest to do so, as call centers benefit immensely from deportees such as Ben, Geronimo, and Jose Carlos who speak English with no trace of a Spanish accent. Jose Carlos told me that they are not supposed to tell customers where they are. They also aren't instructed to lie. But, to make those conversations easier, when a customer asks "Where are you?" Jose Carlos tells them he is in Los Angeles. Customers have no reason to disbelieve him. He explained to me how this works:

Jose Carlos: My job requires speaking English to Americans. They think we're there, but we're really here.

Tanya: Do they ask you?

Jose Carlos: Yea, they ask me. They're not stupid. They say "you're either in the Philippines or India."

Tanya: And what do you say?

Jose Carlos: I say, "No ma'am, I'm in Southern California."

Tanya: Oh, really. That's what you're supposed to say?

Jose Carlos: No, you're supposed to say, "We're not supposed to tell you." And you tell them that. They don't get mad at you because we are really preventing a lot of fucking bullshit. They believe it because of my English.

Tanya: You're not supposed to tell them that you're....

Jose Carlos: We're not supposed to tell them where we are located at all. We're not supposed to bring cameras on the floor or nothing. Because if you take a picture, then you got [the company] logo and everyone is wearing the logo.

Jose Carlos is able to get away with pretending he is in the United States because he speaks English without a foreign accent. Ironically, those Guatemalans who are the most Americanized are those who are the best-suited to work in the call centers. They are deported from the United States because of their foreign-ness and undesirable behavior. They are rejected in their home country because of their Americanized ways and their made-in-the-USA tattoos. And, the only places that accept them – even rely on them – are transnational call centers based in Guatemala that provide customer service to clients in the United States. These call centers do everything from taking orders for parcel delivery to arranging pickups for refrigerators to providing customer service for credit card companies.

Many of these deportees are doing jobs that not only pay a fraction of what they would earn in the United States, but also for which they likely would not qualify in the United States – either because of their undocumented status or because of their criminal record. One of the call centers in Guatemala City's upscale Pacific Center Mall holds a contract with TracFone, which requires them to take over 70,000 phone calls a day. The workers are paid a minimum of \$400 a month – with those workers who have a higher degree of responsibility earning more. Workers in the highly secure areas were responsible for taking credit card and social security numbers from U.S. customers.⁶ Notably, TracFone was awarded a nationally recognized customer service award in 2009.⁷ The call center is owned by Allied Global, which began operations in Guatemala in 2005, with call center services in Spanish. In 2008, the company began to offer services in English, which led to it achieving very high growth rates. 2008 is also when deportations from the United States to Guatemala began to escalate.

Conclusion and Discussion

⁶ <http://www.nearshoreamericas.com/tracfone-is-lead-customer-at-allieds-new-guatemala-city-call-center/>

⁷ <https://tracfonecareers.silkroad.com>

This chapter has focused on what happens to Guatemalans deported from the United States who arrive with visible tattoos. This subset of deportees encounters violence from police and gang members, and stigma from the general public. In countries such as Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, deportee status alone carries official and social stigma, but deportees can learn to hide their status, at least in public (Brotherton and Barrios 2011; Golash-Boza 2013). In Guatemala, deportee status does not carry general stigma, but deportees with visible tattoos experience stigma almost constantly.

Guatemalan deportees who have tattoos face violence, exclusion, and stigmatization unless they cover their tattoos. These men, however, continue to embrace their tattoos, because they serve as a reminder of the life they once lived. Their tattoos connect them to their lives in the United States and to layered identities, and they firmly believe that their tattoos are not inherently bad. For them, the problem lies not with the tattoos, but with the people who make inaccurate assumptions on the basis of their tattoos.

Guatemala City is violent. A recent Guatemalan newspaper article⁸ claimed that criminal deportations from the United States serve to augment violence in Central America – although the article did not mention that less than ten percent of Central Americans are deported for violent crimes. There are myriad causes for violence in Central America and too few real solutions. According to the popular media, criminal gangs called *mareros* and paramilitary groups called *zetas* cause most of this violence. In my research, I found that deportees are much more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence in Guatemala. *Mareros* often mistake deportees with tattoos for gang members. Others may direct suspicion against tattooed deportees because of a widespread perception attributing the roots of gang violence in Central America to the deportation of Central American youth from Los Angeles, stretching back to the 1980s. As such, deportees with tattoos can serve as convenient scapegoats for urban violence. It may be more politically viable to blame tattooed deportees than persistent poverty and extreme inequality – problems that have no easy fix.

⁸ “EE.UU. da poca información de deportados a Centroamérica” *El Periodico* April 9, 2012.
<http://elperiodico.com.gt/es/20120409/elmundo/210533/> Accessed May 23, 2013

Deportees many also serve another interest – that of transnational corporations. Two factors have spurred mass deportation in the United States: the fight against terrorism and the economic crisis. Thus, even though high unemployment in the United States might seem like a reasonable justification for mass deportation, when deportees end up working for transnational corporations taking customer service calls from the United States, at much lower wages, mass deportation facilitates the export of jobs. These jobs in call centers are often the best and only jobs tattooed deportees can secure. They qualify for these jobs because the hiring managers at the call centers do not care if they have tattoos and because their bilingual and bicultural skills make them ideal employees. At \$400 a month, these deportees earn much less than they would doing the same job in Los Angeles, as one of my respondents routinely pretends.

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